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ABSTRACT

A 5-week study was conducted to examine the acquainting process--changes that occur as a relationship between two strangers develops. Fifty subjects were paired in same sex dyads and were asked to talk to one another once a week for half-hour periods. The unstructured conversations were tape-recorded and questionnaires were administered to the subjects in separate rooms immediately following each interaction. The questionnaire measured the variables of uncertainty, affective reactions, trust, forecasting (future-oriented assessments of the relationship by individuals), and attraction. Five repeated-measures trend analyses were employed to test for changes in the individiual variables over time. The results indicated that uncertainty decreased over time, both trust and attraction increased over time, and forecasting and affective reactions became more positive over time. The results yielded preliminary support for distinct phases of acquainting as follows: (1) uncertainty, (2) exploratory effect, (3) interpersonal growth, and (4) interpersonal stability. (Tables of analyses results and figures illustrating the acquainting path are appended.) (HTH)

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Beyond Initial Interaction: A Developmental Study of the Acquainting Process

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Beyond Initial Interaction: A Developmental Study of the Acquainting Process

ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a longitudinal study of the acquainting process. A repeated measures design was employed to observe changes in five variables (uncertainty, affective reactions, trust, forecasting of rewards, attraction) over five weeks. A path model using these variables was proposed and tested. Results showed that all five variables changed over time. In addition, affective reactions and uncertainty differentially contributed to trust, affective reactions and trust consistently contributed to forecasting, and affective reactions and forecasting consistently contributed to attraction. Based on the findings of the study, a four phase model of the acquainting process was proposed including: (1) uncertainty, (2) exploratory affect, (3) interpersonal growth, and (4) interpersonal stability.

In recent years, communication scholars have emphasized the developmental nature of interpersonal relationships. Miller (1978), for example, has argued that a developmental approach best reflects the processual aspects of relationships and he has suggested that priority be given to those longitudinal inquiries most consistent with this developmental focus. Bochner (1978) has similarly underscored the importance of a developmental approach to interpersonal communication, pointing out the need for more precision in theory and research. Other calls for developmental research in interpersonal communication have been advanced by Miller and Steinberg (1975) and Rossiter and Pearce (1975).

The notion of relational development revolves around the concept of time and, more specifically, change in interpersonal process over time. Developmental research attempts to move away from static (snapshot) accounts of relationship to more dynamic (motion picture) accounts of relationship. Unfortunately, despite advances in developmental research into small groups (Fisher, 1970; Poole, 1981), very few interpersonal studies have incorporated time into their designs. Such longitudinal demands are required, however, if research is to play a meaningful role in communication theories of relational development. This study takes such a longitudinal focus in order to investigate some developmental aspects of the acquainting process.

Communication theorists and researchers have spent little time exploring the period beyond initial interaction when people become acquainted. Theories of relational development, for

example, focus primarily on movement toward intimacy and treat acquainting as little more than a necessary prelude to intimate growth. Research on relational development, on the other hand, has been largely confined to initial interaction and has left the period beyond initial interaction relatively unexamined. The purpose of this study is to examine more clearly this period beyond initial interaction and to hopefully enrich our theoretical conceptions of the acquainting process.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Even a cursory review of research on relational development yields a barrage of explanatory concepts including attraction (Byrne, 1971; McCroskey & McCain, 1974), communication apprehension (McCroskey et al., 1975), control (Millar & Rogers, 1976; Fisher & Beach, 1977), costs and rewards (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), physical proximity (Priest & Sawyer, 1967), self-disclosure (Gilbert, 1976), similarity (Duck, 1973), trust (Giffin, 1967; Pearce, 1974), and uncertainty reduction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In this study, we focus our attention to a particular set of these variables including attraction, trust, costs and rewards, and uncertainty.

Attraction

Attraction has long been recognized as a primary dependent variable in many interpersonal studies. Indeed, virtually all of the variables listed above have been employed at some point as independent variables for predicting attraction (for a review of attraction research, see Byrne & Giffitt, 1973; Huston,

1974). In this study, we are interested in social attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Social attraction represents the degree to which individuals like each other and consider themselves potential friends. Thus, social attraction involves both liking and friendship projection. This study does not examine physical nor task attraction.

Trust

The development of interpersonal relationships is frequently attributed to the extent to which the relational partners trust each other. Trust has been conceptualized in a number of ways including risky situations (Deutsch, 1968), dependent behaviors (Bridges, 1970), and favorable perceptions (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Our conception of trust is similar to that of Weeles and Grotz (1977) in which trust is defined in terms of the perception of another's reliability and honesty. We believe that trust plays an important role in determining whether a relationship will develop. In addition, trust may not only have a direct impact on attraction, but may serve as an important intervening variable as well.

Costs and Rewards

Altman and Taylor (1973) have proposed a model of relational development partially based on the concepts of costs and rewards. Borrowing from Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Altman and Taylor view costs as factors which inhibit an individual's behavior while rewards are those pleasures, satisfactions, and gratifications that one enjoys (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, pp. 12-13).

Altman and Taylor suggest that as rewards exceed costs relationships become more intimate but as costs exceed rewards relationships tend to remain at certain levels or regress and dissolve. More specifically, they argue that as persons simultaneously interact, they "assess positive and negative facets of what is happening 'now', extrapolate to the future, form a picture of the other person, and reach some decision about next steps" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 37). Thus, costs and rewards are conceived in both an immediate and projective sense.

Although costs and rewards remain popular explanatory concepts, they have enjoyed little operationalization in communication research. The knotty issue that has faced researchers is the problem of adequately specifying what is costsly and rewarding in relationships. For example, costs and rewards have been dealt with in terms of compatibility (Schutz, 1958), attraction (Newcomb, 1961), goal achievement (Bennis et al., 1964), and self-esteem (Sullivan, 1953). For us, a conception of costs and rewards should be interaction based. As we assume the centrality of communication in developing relationships, we believe that costs and rewards are primarily assessed on the basis of interaction with another person. We also find the distinction between immediate and projective costs and rewards potentially useful. Thus, in this study, we employ two conceptualizations of costs and rewards: affective reactions and forecasting.

Affective reactions refer to how individuals experience particular interactional episodes with others. It is a "here and now" judgment of an immediately prior encounter. As Altman and Taylor (1973) argued:

> The evaluation process is similar to the concept of comparison level . . . which refers to a subjective neutral point on a continuum of satisfaction-dissatisfaction, and against which people determine the value of an immediately preceding interaction with regard to a personal-subjective standard of desirability. (p. 36)

Forecasting, on the other hand, refers to future-oriented assessments made by individuals. These judgments are projective ones "which deal with the question 'Will it be rewarding to interact with this person in the future' " (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 36). Altman and Taylor argue that both of these dimensions of costs and rewards play a crucial role in relational development.

Uncertainty

Berger and Calabrese (1975) have offered theoretical propositions of initial interaction based on the construct of uncertainty reduction. For these theorists, uncertainty reduction refers to one's "attributional confidence"; that is, one's ability to explain and predict another's behavior (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, 1975). Central to Berger and Calabrese's formulations is the assumption that "when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction" (1975, p. 101). These theorists posit that decreases in uncertainty levels will be associated with increases in liking.

Uncertainty is an important communication variable but certain precautions must be exercised when assessing its impact on relational development. For example, although uncertainty reduction may be a necessary antecedent to attraction, it is probably not a sufficient one. Afterall, one may be very

certain that an individual is untrustworthy, and thus relational development is unlikely. It is our belief that uncertainty reduction is important but that its effect is mediated through other variables such as costs and rewards and trust.

We treat the variables outlined above as a set with a particular logical order. In this study, we view affective reactions and uncertainty as exogenous variables, trust and forecasting as intervening variables, and attraction as the main dependent variable. This model represents one parsimonious account of relational development which has seen some theoretical and empirical support. The extent to which the data fit this conceptual model is one question of the study.

This study seeks to examine the variable set presented above in a number of ways. First, we are interested in the extent to which the individual variables change over time and in the exact nature of any changes. Second, given the logical priority of the variable set, we seek to assess the strength of all antecedent variables in predicting the endogenous variables. Thus, we examine the impact of the following variables: affective reactions and uncertainty on trust; affective reactions, uncertainty, and trust on forecasting; and affective reactions, uncertainty, trust, and forecasting on attraction. Finally, should these variables have interaction effects with time, we will assess the temporal differences by calculating changes in the path model over time. The fully connected path model representing this variable set is shown in Figure 1.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Changes Over Time

Our first set of hypothese and research questions concern the changes in individual variables over time. Based on Berger and Calabrese's (1975) formulations, we predict that uncertainty will decrease over time but we do not predict whether this decrease will be linear or curvilinear nor do we predict the point in the acquainting process at which uncertainty will decrease. In addition, we expect that affective reactions, trust, forecasting, and attraction will change over time. Although uncertainty is most often reduced with continued interaction, relationships may take several directions only one of which is increased affective reactions, trust, forecasting, and attraction. Therefore, we do not posit directional hypotheses for these variables. However, as the data to be analyzed represents only those subjects who continue with the study, it is very likely that results will favor positive growth on these variables. In addition, we do not predict whether these changes will be linear or curvilinear nor do we predict the point at which these variables will change. The hypotheses and research questions for changes in individual variables over time include:

H_1: Uncertainty will decrease over time, but the decrease may not be linear.

H_2: Affective Reactions will change over time, but the change may not be linear.

H_3: Trust will change over time but the change may not be linear.

H_4: Forecasting will change over time, but the change may not be linear.

H_5: Attraction will charge over time, but the change may not be linear.

Q_1: At what point(s) in the acquainting process do the levels of uncertainty, affective reactions, trust, forecasting, and attraction change?

Prediction of Trust

As noted earlier, affective reactions and uncertainty are considered exogenous variables. We believe that trust is dependent on both of these variables. If one is unable to predict another, one cannot trust that person. The prediction of another's behavior (an informational factor) is necessary for determing trust. We also propose that trust is dependent on an affective component. Few individuals would claim they trust another person if they were to experience very uncomfortable and unpleasant interaction with that person. Thus, both uncertainty and affective reactions are expected to contribute significantly to trust. We do not, however, predict whether or not these exogenous variables will significantly interact with time. The hypotheses and research questions for the prediction of trust are:

H_6: Uncertainty will have a significant main effect on trust when affective reactions are controlled (i.e. there will be a significant negative direct path from uncertainty to trust).

H_7: Affective reactions will have a significant main effect on trust when uncertainty is controlled (i.e. there will be a significant positive direct path from affective reactions to trust).

Q_2: Are there any significant interaction effects for time X uncertainty or time X affective reactions in predicting trust (i.e. does the nature of the path model change over time)?

Prediction of Forecasting

We expect that affective reactions will contribute to forecasting. Because affective reactions indicate rewards obtained in the immediate interaction and forecasting represents expected rewards from future interaction, we predict a positive path from

affective reactions to forecasting. In addition, we predict that trust will contribute to forecasting. It is unlikely that we expect future rewards from an interactional partner we believe is unreliable and deceitful. It is not readily apparent, however, if forecasting becomes more positive when uncertainty is reduced. Therefore, we neither predict nor discount the possibility of a main effect for uncertainty on forecasting. In addition, we do not predict whether or not there will be interaction effects with time. The hypotheses and research questions for the prediction of forecasting include:

H_8: Affective reactions will have a significant main effect on forecasting when uncertainty and trust are controlled (i.e. there will be a significant positive direct path from affective reactions to forecasting).

H_9: Trust will have a significant main effect on forecasting when affective reactions and uncertainty are controlled (i.e. there will be a significant positive direct path from trust to forecasting).

Q_3: Does uncertainty have a significant main effect on forecasting when affective reactions and trust are controlled (i.e. is there a significant direct path from uncertainty to forecasting)?

Q_4: Are there significant interaction effects for time X affective reactions, time X uncertainty, time X trust, in predicting forecasting (i.e. does the nature of the path model change over time)?

Prediction of Attraction

Uncertainty is not expected to have a direct effect on attraction when other variables are controlled. As argued earlier, uncertainty is believed to work through other variables in predicting attraction. Forecasting is expected to have a significant effect on attraction when other variables are controlled. We believe that the projection of rewarding future interaction is an important contributor to liking and firendship projection.

We do not venture specific hypotheses regarding the effects of affective reactions and trust. These variables at least indirectly contribute to attraction but their direct effects are posed as research questions. In addition, predictions about interaction effects with time are not formulated. The hypotheses and research questions for predicting attraction include:

H_{10}: Uncertainty will not have a significant main effect on attraction when affective reactions, trust, and forecasting are controlled (i.e. there will not be a significant direct path from uncertainty to attraction).

H_{11}: Forecasting will have a significant main effect on attraction when affective reactions, trust, and uncertainty are controlled (i.e. there will be a significant positive direct path from forecasting to attraction).

Q_5: Does affective reactions have a significant main effect on attraction when uncertainty, trust, and forecasting are controlled (i.e. is there a significant direct path from affective reactions to attraction)?

Q_6: Does trust have a significant main effect on attraction when affective reactions, uncertainty, and forecasting are controlled (i.e. is there a significant direct path from trust to attraction)?

Q_7: Are there significant interaction effects for time X affective reactions, time X uncertainty, time X trust, or time X forecasting in predicting attraction (i.e. does the nature of the path model change over time)?

METHOD

Measures

The measuring instruments used in this study are presented in Table 1. We constructed these scales with the minimum number of items necessary to adequately measure the variables in order to minimize the work required of the subjects. Of the five instruments employed, two (affective reactions and forecasting) were developed specifically for this study. To provide semantic continuity for the subjects, items from each of the instruments were followed by a five-point scale with a label for each

point.

Affective reactions. Four Likert type items were used to measure affective reactions. As suggested earlier, we view affective reactions as a measure of the extent to which subjects experience a pleasant and rewarding interaction. In the context of the Altman and Taylor (1973) model, positive affective reactions represent a partial assessment of these rewards arising from interaction. Likewise, negative affective reactions partially reflect the costs of the interaction.

Uncertainty. Uncertainty was conceptualized in terms of "proactive attributional confidence" (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), and was measured by five items selected from Clatterbuck's (1979) CLUES7 scale. Each item was followed by a scale consisting of the following choices: absolutely positive, very sure, reasonably sure, somewhat unsure, very unsure.

Trust. Trust was measured by four items with high loadings selected from the Wheeles and Grotz (1977) trust measure. In this study, these items were followed by a Likert scale.

Forecasting. The four items designed to measure forecasting required the subjects to project the extent to which future interaction and the relationship would be enjoyable and worthwhile. These items were followed by Likert scales.

Attraction. Attraction was measured by two items. One item represented the highest loading scale from the McCroskey and McCain (1974) social attraction scale. The second item was taken from the Byrne (1971) attraction measure. These items were selected because they most clearly represented those aspects of attraction we wished to predict: liking and friendship

projection. These items were followed by Likert scales.

Procedures

Undergraduate student volunteers from a large western university (N=80) participated in the study. These subjects were informed that they would be participating in a study on the acquainting process and were asked to talk to another volunteer once a week for one-half hour. The sole requirement was that the pair did not know each other prior to the study. The conversations were unstructured; no tasks or instructions were provided. All conversations were tape recorder and questinaires were administered to the subjects in separate rooms immediately following each interaction. Only same sex dyads were used.

The study lasted five weeks. Of the 80 students who participated in week 1, 50 subjects (25 dyads) continued for the full five weeks (attrition rate = 38%). Subjects were paired on the basis of their schedules and the most apparent reason for the attrition rate was scheduling problems. Only data for the 50 subjects who participated through week 5 are included in the present analyses.

Statistical Analyses

A repeated measures multiple regression approach was used for all of the analyses in this study. As Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973) have argued, multiple regression represents a more flexible and more sensitive approach to repeated measures designs than ANOVA or ANOCOV. In addition, the repeated measures ANOVA and ANOCOV programs (e.g. BMDP2V) lacked adequate data transformation facilities for this study.

Changes over time. Five repeated measures trend analyses were employed to test for changes in the individual variables over time. Forty-nine dummy coded vectors representing within subjects variance were created. Hierarchical tests for the linear, quadratic, and cubic effects of time were performed on each of the variables. Tests of differences between the means for each week were also computed. These tests were adjusted for the within subjects variance.

Prediction of trust, forecasting, and attraction. The second set of tests consisted of repeated measures analyses of covariance predicting trust, forecasting and attraction. Within subjects variance was again represented by the dummy coded vectors. For predicting trust; affective reactions and uncertainty were included as covariates and the main effect of time was adjusted for these covariates. For predicting forecasting; affective reactions, uncertainty, and trust were included as covariates and the main effect of time was adjusted for these covariates. For predicting attraction; affective reactions, uncertainty, trust, and forecasting were included as covariates and the main effect of time was adjusted for these covariates. The main effects of the covariates in all three analyses were adjusted for the saturated model.

Covariate X time interactions (i.e. homogeneity of regression slopes) were also tested adjusting for the additive model but not for other interaction effects. A significant covariate X time interaction would indicate that the regression slopes were not homogeneous over time or that at different points in time, the covariates differentially contributed to the

endogenous variable. Thus, any significant covariate X time interaction would result in variations in the path coefficients over time and would lead us to conduct separate path analyses for each week. If covariate X time interactions are not significant, the best estimates of the path coefficients are the common regression slopes found in the analyses of covariance.

RESULTS

Reliability

Alpha reliabilities for each of the 5 measures were conducted independently for each of the 5 weeks. The average alphas are presented in Table 1. All of the estimates were considered within the range of what is conventionally regarded as acceptable.

Changes Over Time

The results of the trend analysis for uncertainty is presented in Table 2. These results indicate that uncertainty decreased over time, supporting hypothesis 1. This decrease accounted for 12.3% of the variance. The decrease in uncertainty is best described as quadratic. The contrasts between means reveal that there was a significant decrease from week 1 to week 2, but no change after week 2.

The results of the trend analysis for affective reactions is presented in Table 3. These results support hypothesis 2 which predicted that affective reactions would change over time. This change accounted for 8.8% of the variance. This change can be characterized as a positive linear increase insofar as affective reactions generally became more positive over time.

An examination of week by week contrasts revealed a significant increase from week 1 to week 2 and from week 2 to week 3, but no further significant increase beyond week 3. This finding suggests that although the increase is generally linear, it slows considerably after week 3.

Table 4 presents the results for the trend analysis for trust. Trust significantly increased over time as predicted in hypothesis 3. This increase accounted for 4.3% of the variance. Again, the increase is best described as a linear positive change. There was no significant difference from week 1 to week 2 but there was a significant increase from week 2 to week 3. There appeared to be no significant increases after week 3 in trust.

The results of the trend analysis for forecasting are presented in Table 5. The results show a significant yet small change in forecasting over the five weeks. This change accounts for 2.4% of the variance. This change is best described as a gradual positive increase as the results show a significant increase from week 1 to week 5 but no significant changes between contiguous weeks. This finding suggests that after the initial forecast, the gradual cumulative increase does not reach statistical significance until week 5.

Table 6 presents the results of the trend analysis for attraction. These results indicate that attraction significantly increased over time supporting hypothesis 5. This increase accounted for 4.6% of the variance. This increase is best described as a positive linear change. Week by week contrasts show a significant increase only from week 2 to week 3.

The trend analyses showed different profiles of change for each of the variables. Uncertainty was the only variable with a nonlinear trend. Uncertainty changed from week 1 to week 2 then did not significantly change again. Affective reactions, on the other hand, significantly increased from both week 1 to week 2 and week 2 to week 3, but did not significantly increase after week 3. Similarly, trust and attraction did not significantly change after week 3 and their change was limited from week 2 to week 3. Forecasting showed no changes between contigous weeks but had a gradual positive increase from week 1 to week 5.

Prediction of Trust

The results of the analysis of covariance predicting trust are presented in Table 7. Although there were no significant main effects for uncertainty or affective reactions as predicted in hypotheses 6 and 7, there were significant covariate X time interactions. These interaction effects showed that uncertainty and affective reactions differentially contributed to trust over time. These effects were considerable as evidenced by the substantive amount of variance explained. The saturated model accounted for 82% of the variance of trust; of this, 23% was accounted for by within subjects variance.

The significant covariate X time interactions on trust demonstrate that the regression slopes were not homogenous over time. Accordingly, path coefficients were calculated for each separate week. These coefficients are offered in Table 10. The findings reveal that in the first 3 weeks, there was a tradeoff between affective reactions and uncertainty in predicting trust.

Uncertainty had a direct negative path to trust in week 1, affective reactions had a direct positive path to trust in week 2, and uncertainty had a direct negative path to trust in week 3. Only at weeks 4 and 5 do affective reactions and uncertainty both significantly contribute directly to trust.

Prediction of Forecasting

The results of the analysis of covariance predicting forecasting are displayed in Table 8. These results show a significant main effect for affective reactions and for trust as predicted in hypotheses 8 and 9. The strength of these predictors is considerable as suggested by the large amount of variance explained in the analysis. The saturated model explained 86% of the variance of forecasting; of this, 16% is accounted for by within subjects variance and 67% is due to the additive model.

Uncertainty did not have a significant main effect on forecasting. This finding suggests that forecasting does not necessarily become more positive as uncertainty decreases.

No covariate X time interactions were found to be significant in predicting forecasting. Separate path analyses for each week were not conducted. Thus, the regression slopes found in the analysis of covariance represent the best estimates of the path coefficients. These values are offered in Table 10.

Prediction of Attraction

Table 9 displays the results of the analysis of covariance predicting attraction. Both hypotheses regarding the prediction of attraction received support (hypotheses 10 and 11). First, uncertainty did not have a significant main effect on attraction when other variables were controlled. Second,

forecasting did have a main effect on attraction when controlling for other variables. Clearly, the projective nature of the forecasting and attraction measures may be partly responsible for this association but the fact remains that forecasting was a strong predictor of attraction. In addition, affective reactions also had a significant main effect on attraction. This result indicates that the impact of costs and rewards on attraction does not come solely from forecasting. Although affective reactions are a necessary contributor to forecasting, they also impact attraction directly. The strength of these predictors of attraction are considerable as demonstrated by the substantive amount of variance explained. The saturated model accounted for 84% of the variance; of this, 10% is accounted for by within subjects variance and 70% is due to the additive model.

As with the prediction of forecasting, no covariate X time interactions were found to be significant. The regression slopes from the analysis of covariance thus serve as the best estimates of the path coefficients. These values are presented in Table 10.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this study provide important information about the acquainting process. The trend analyses indicated that all of the variables significantly changed over time. Most interesting were the ways in which these variables changed. From week 1 to week 2, uncertainty and affective reactions had significant changes. From week 2 to week 3, the variables trust, attraction, and affective reactions significantly increased. There was no significant change after week 3 on any variable. Forecasting showed a gradual change from week 1 to week 5.

These trends suggest that uncertainty is reduced very early in the acquainting process, but then decreases far less markedly in later stages. Affective reactions also appear early in the acquainting process. After these early changes in uncertainty and affective reactions, trust, attraction, and affective reactions enjoy brief but substantive periods of growth followed by little subsequent change.

The results of the three analyses of covariance and the path analysis of trust are summarized diagrammatically in Figure 2. Several findings indicated by the model merit attention. First, affective reactions and uncertainty differentially effected trust over time. It may be that trust is dependent on both an informational factor (uncertainty reduction) and an affective factor (affective reactions) and that these two influences are mutually exclusive in the early stages of acquainting then work together on trust as the process becomes more stabilized. Second, forecasting was influenced consistently by affective reactions and trust. These results confirm our expectation that rewards obtained from particular encounters and the perceived trust of another influence our projections about future interaction. Uncertainty, however, did not significantly contribute to forecasting and it appears that uncertainty reduction is not a sufficient condition for projecting future rewards in the acquainting process. Finally, the results demonstrated that costs and rewards, as operationalized by affective reactions and forecasting, were the only direct predictors of attraction. These findings lend empirical support to Altman and Taylor's (1973) position that liking is influenced by both an immediate and projective assessment. Uncertainty and trust, however, did not directly influence attraction. Our belief is that these variables work through other variables in predicting

attraction.

The results of all tests show significant effects due to within subjects variance. There are several interpretations of these effects (Kerlinger & Pedhazer, 1973). First, these effects may be interpreted as indicating that subjects exhibited a degree of consistency in their responses. Second, these results technically indicate the decrease in error variance which results from having subjects act as their own control. Finally, these results show that there were significant differences among the subjects in terms of how they scored on the various measures. This latter interpretation is consistent with our view that different relationships take different trajectories (e.g. some people come to like each other more than others).

The results of this study are tentative and should be interpreted with care. The small n employed must be remembered when considering the regression analyses. In addition, due to the limitations of the regression program used (SPSS), it was not possible to test for a subject X time interaction.[1] Consequently, we do not know if different individuals changed their perceptions at different rates. Nevertheless, when the results from the three different analyses are taken together, they do yield preliminary support for distinct phases of acquainting. The final section of this report presents these tentative phases in an effort to refine our understanding of the period beyond initial interaction.

Toward a Phase Model of Acquainting

Communication theorists have invested little energy in examining the acquainting process. Most relationship theories assume that partners move from anonymity through acquainting to intimacy and it is this movement toward intimacy that has

received the most attention (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp, 1978).

Many relationships, of course, do follow the trajectory toward intimacy presented in interpersonal theories, but many do not. Many acquaintance relationships (e.g. casual friends, neighbors, co-workers), remain stable and enduring without ever approaching intimacy. According to most models, however, these acquaintances are viewed as individuals who are at least temporarily stalled in a very early stage of development.

We believe that acquaintance relationships are more fully developed than previously argued. We agree with Duck (1976) that "acquaintance is a developmental process involving stages and characteristically different mechanisms at each stage. . . ." (p. 135). By outlining some tentative phases of acquainting from the findings of this study, we hope to uncover some of the more intricate features of the process. The following phases of acquainting are offered: (1) uncertainty, (2) exploratory affect, (3) interpersonal growth, and (4) interpersonal stability.

Uncertainty. It is axiomatic that the earliest stage of relational development is characterized by uncertainty. This period is one of primary tension (Bormann, 1975) in which individuals do not know what to expect from others nor know what is expected of them. It is a time of awkwardness, tentativeness, stereotypic interaction, and low intensity as individuals orient themselves to the situation and to their interactional partners.

The results obtained in this study concur with these general notions of initial interaction. As expected, uncertainty was at its highest level at week 1. In addition, uncertainty was the only signficant predictor of trust at week 1. These findings lend empirical support to the centrality of uncertainty during the

initial phase of relational development (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Uncertainty is perhaps more accurately considered a characteristic of initial interaction than an initial phase of acquainting. The important point is that the high level of uncertainty during this early period may preclude other relational judgments. In this study, for example, affective reactions, trust, and attraction were at their lowest levels at week 1. Until we become more familiar with both the setting and our partner, it is unlikely that these other relational assessments will be very positive.

Exploratory Affect. The second phase in acquainting is characterized by a high reduction of uncertainty. In this study, uncertainty had its largest decrease from week 1 to week 2. At this point in the process, however, uncertainty did not significantly predict any of the dependent variables. It appears that during this period, uncertainty does not directly contribute to relational development but serves to unfreeze affective assessments. Thus, uncertainty reduction is a necessary prelude to the formation of other relationship judgments.

During this second phase, the affective dimension of acquainting becomes more salient, though its impact appears to be limited. At this point, individuals become more comfortable with the interactional setting but may be hesitant to make other relational judgments. In this study, affective reactions significantly increased in week 2 while trust and attraction remained low. Affective reactions also had the only path to trust in week 2 as the impact of uncertainty washed out. As noted, these affective reactions are tied directly to an immediately preceding encounter with another. Thus, increased positive judgments during this second phase may be confined to the particular interactional episodes we experience.

The experience of positive affective reactions is critical to the development of acquaintances. These positive reactions serve as necessary antecedents to positive judgments on other relational dimensions. If we do not enjoy early encounters with someone, it is unlikely that the acquainting process will continue. In short, positive affect during this phase enhances the potential for subsequent interaction and relational development.

Interpersonal Growth. Most evident during the third stage of acquainting is the substantive increase in positive judgments of one's partner. In week 3, affective reactions, trust, and attraction all significantly increased evidencing substantial growth. In addition, uncertainty reappears as the only predictor of trust. Thus, virtually all of the variables examined in this study had some contribution to the acquainting process at this phase.

A number of characteristics discussed in the literature (Knapp, 1978; Altman & Taylor, 1973) may become apparent during this stage. The interactants may begin to exchange more information about themselves, though these disclosures are not necessarily personal. The pair may begin to refer to one another by name. Finally, interaction during this period may increase in spontaneity and is probably more relaxed and casual.

The implication from this phase of acquainting is that individuals begin to make positive judgments of their interactional partner relatively early in relational development. These increases, however, do not necessarily indicate that a relationship is approaching intimacy; rather, they indicate that a relationship is experiencing growth. And, while this growth may be a necessary prelude to intimacy, it can serve as a basis for the enduring relationship that many acquaintances enjoy.

Interpersonal Stability. Many theories of relational development treat stability as a characteristic unique to those relationships which have reached intimacy. We believe this is far too confining to limit stability to one type of relationship and we argue that acquaintances also experience stability in relational development.

Although the subjects in this study interacted for an admittedly short time, there is evidence that some stability emerged. After week 3, neither affective reactions, trust, attraction, nor uncertainty significantly changed. In addition, the seesaw effect of affective reactions and uncertainty on trust discontinued and both variables influenced trust at weeks 4 and 5. These data suggest that interpersonal growth begins to level off in the acquainting process. Though movement on these variables indicate a linear trend, this movement begins to stabilize.

This stability in acquaintance relationships, of course, may be very different from the coalescing of personalities experienced by intimates (Knapp, 1978, p. 20). For acquaintances, stability is a period not of intense commitment or emotion but of gradually increasing affect, trust, and attraction. The implication remains, however, that interpersonal stability is a characteristic of acquaintance relationships that warrants attention in future communication research.

CONCLUSION

Conceptually, this study appears to endorse a very cognitive and very rational view of relational development, a position which has come under recent attack. Some researchers (Berger, 1980; Delia, 1980) have argued that theorists using notions of costs

and rewards and uncertainty reduction overrationalize the relationshipprocess. We agree, with an important qualifier. Our view of relational development is that individuals do make many assessments of costs and rewards, trust, and uncertainty, but these assessments are not as conscious as the labels imply. Most of us do not consciously calculate reward/cost ratios as the more economic models would have us believe. On the other hand, we frequently make judgments such as "That was really awkward talking with him today" or "I'm really looking forward to seeing her next week." These assessments, while only partially constitutive of relational development, cannot be overlooked. This study sought to examine the nature of these types of judgments in acquainting.

We believe this study is a significant contribution to the literature on relational development. Perhaps most heuristic is the tentative model of acquainting presented here. The phases of uncertainty, exploratory affect, interpersonal growth, and interpersonal stability have both intuitive appeal and empirical support. Future studies of acquainting can assess the generalizability of the model and add clarity to these phases. Future research may also extend the research conducted here in several ways. First, future research might examine whether different types of individuals move through these phases in different orders or at different rates. Second, researchers can examine if relational partners experience these phases similarly. The model proposed here reflects the development of individual, not mutual, perceptions. Finally, future research should explore the interactional characteristics of these phases. The findings from these studies would greatly enhance our understanding of the acquainting process and move our research beyond the period of initial interaction.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The SPSS program will only handle 100 variables in a single regression equation. If we would have included these interactions, it would have required 249 vectors in our most simple equation. BMDP2V is also incapable of considering a subject X time interaction.

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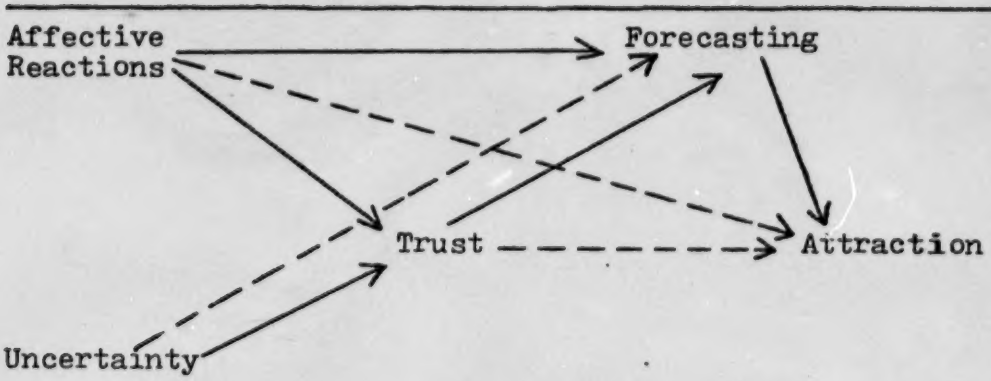
Figure 1

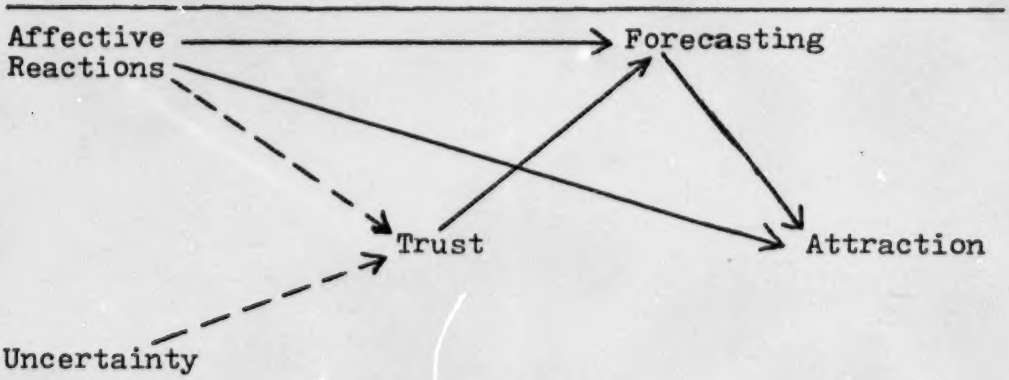
PREDICTED PATH MODEL



Note: Solid lines represent predicted paths as specified by the hypotheses. Dotted lines represent paths that are neither predicted nor discounted but are specified as research questions. The deletion of the path from uncertainty to attraction corresponds with our prediction that uncertainty will not have a direct effect on attraction.

Figure 2

OBTAINED PATH MODEL



Note: The dotted lines represent the time variant paths. The solid lines represent the time invariant paths.

Table 1

MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

Affective Reactions -- Alpha Average = .7696

1. I felt at ease during today's conversation.
2. I felt turned off during the conversation today.
3. I felt cautious during today's conversation.
4. I felt accepted during the conversation today.

Uncertainty (Proactive Attributional Confidence) -- Alpha Ave. = .9144

1. How confident are you of your general ability to predict how your partner will behave?
2. How certain are you of how your partner feels about you?
3. How certain are you of your ability to accurately predict the values and attitudes your partner holds?
4. How certain are you of your ability to accurately predict your partner's feelings and emotions?
5. How certain are you that you know your partner?

Trust -- Alpha Average = .8212

1. My partner is deceitful.
2. My partner is trustworthy.
3. My partner is reliable.
4. My partner is inconsiderate.

Forecasting -- Alpha Average = .8206

1. I expect that future interaction with my partner will be enjoyable.
2. I expect that this relationship will be worthless for me.
3. I expect that future interaction with my partner will be unpleasant.
4. I expect that this relationship will be valuable for me.

Attraction -- Alpha Average = .7694

1. I feel that I like this person.
2. I think my partner could be a friend of mine.

Table 2

MEANS, TRENDS, AND CONTRASTS

FOR UNCERTAINTY OVER TIME

	Means	Standard Deviations
Week 1	18.26	3.022
Week 2	15.66	4.331
Week 3	15.44	3.025
Week 4	15.30	2.597
Week 5	14.84	3.013

Trend Analysis

	R^2	R^2 Change	F
Total	.67209		7.734*
Linear	.08767		23.831*
Quadratic		.02296	6.398*
Cubic		.01233	3.458
Total Effect for Time	.12384		18.506*
Within Subjects		.54825	6.699*

Contrasts

	b	F
Week 1 v. Week 2	-2.600	34.167*
Week 2 v. Week 3	-.220	.245
Week 3 v. Week 4	-.140	.099
Week 4 v. Week 5	-.460	1.069
Week 2 v. Week 5	-.820	3.398

*$p < .05$

Table 3

MEANS, TRENDS, AND CONTRASTS

FOR AFFECTIVE REACTIONS OVER TIME

	Means	Standard Deviations
Week 1	14.26	1.99
Week 2	15.14	3.74
Week 3	16.02	2.29
Week 4	16.16	1.97
Week 5	16.30	2.11

Trend Analysis

	R^2	R^2 Change	F
Total	.42375		2.719*
Linear	.07672		25.410*
Total Effect of Time	.08803		7.860*
Deviation from Linearity		.0113	1.281
Within Subjects		.33572	2.330*

Contrasts

	b	F
Week 1 v. Week 2	.880	3.885*
Week 2 v. Week 3	.880	3.885*
Week 3 v. Week 4	.140	.098
Week 4 v. Week 5	.140	.098
Week 3 v. Week 5	.280	.393

*$p < .05$

Table 4

MEANS, TRENDS, AND CONTRASTS

FOR TRUST OVER TIME

	Means	Standard Deviations
Week 1	15.60	1.830
Week 2	15.58	3.737
Week 3	16.40	1.726
Week 4	16.68	1.789
Week 5	16.64	1.956

Trend Analysis

	R^2	R^2 Change	F
Total	.49955		3.691*
Linear	.03614		14.172*
Total Effect of Time	.04312		4.225*
Deviation from Linearity		.0009	.411
Within Subjects		.44960	3.653*

Contrasts

	b	F
Week 1 v. Week 2	-.020	.003
Week 2 v. Week 3	.820	4.706*
Week 3 v. Week 4	.280	.549
Week 4 v. Week 5	-.040	.011
Week 3 v. Week 5	.240	.403

*$p < .05$

Table 5

MEANS, TRENDS, AND CONTRASTS

FOR FORECASTING OVER TIME

	Means	Standard Deviations
Week 1	15.38	1.850
Week 2	15.30	3.593
Week 3	15.84	2.084
Week 4	15.94	2,289
Week 5	16.20	2.304

Trend Analysis

	R^2	R^2 Change	F
Total	.51039		3.8551*
Linear	.01667		6.211*
Total Effect of Time	.02429		2.431*
Deviation from Linearity		.00762	.946
Within Subjects		.4861	3.968*

Contrasts

	b	F
Week 1 v. Week 2	-.080	.038
Week 2 v. Week 3	.540	1.741
Week 3 v. Week 4	.100	.060
Week 4 v. Week 5	.260	.404
Week 1 v. Week 4	.560	1.872
Week 1 v. Week 5	.820	4.014*
Week 2 v. Week 5	.900	4.836*
Week 3 v. Week 5	.360	.774

*$p < .05$

Table 6

MEANS, TRENDS, AND CONTRASTS

FOR ATTRACTION OVER TIME

	Means	Standard Deviations
Week 1	7.64	1.07
Week 2	7.74	1.79
Week 3	8.16	1.00
Week 4	8.16	1.13
Week 5	8.36	1.10

Trend Analysis

	R^2	R^2 Change	F
Total	.4810		3.427*
Linear	.0429		11.123*
Total Effect for Time	.0468		4.366*
Deviation from Linearity		.0039	.332
Within Subjects		.4342	3.142*

Contrasts

	b	F
Week 1 v. Week 2	.100	.234
Week 2 v. Week 3	.420	4.133*
Week 3 v. Week 4	.000	.000
Week 4 v. Week 5	.200	.937
Week 3 v. Week 5	.200	.937

*$p < .05$

Table 7

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE

PREDICTING TRUST

	R^2	R^2 Change	Beta	F
Saturated Model	.8152			13.305*
Additive Model	.4629			34.902*
Affective Reactions (AR)			.1697	2.420
Uncertainty (U)			-.1747	2.783
Time Adjusted for Covariates		.0063		.713
Interactions Adjusted for Covariates				
AR X Time		.0819		11.230*
U X Time		.0457		5.546*
Within Subjects		.2303		4.777*

Note: The F values for the covariate main effects are based upon their Beta weights adjusted for the saturated model. The F values for the interactions are based upon the increase in R^2 over the additive model without adjusting for other interactions.

*$p < .05$

Table 8

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE

PREDICTING FORECASTING

	R^2	R^2 Change	Beta	F
Saturated Model	.8593			16.585*
Additive Model	.6730			71.151*
Affective Reactions (AR)			.3472	12.718*
Uncertainty (U)			.0274	.078
Trust (T)			.3192	8.552*
Time Adjusted for Covariates		.0063		.713
Interactions Adjusted for Covariates				
AR X Time		.0090		1.679
U X Time		.0118		2.270
T X Time		.0041		.732
Within Subjects		.1635		4.333*

Note: The F values for the covariate main effects are based upon their Beta weights adjusted for the saturated model. The F values for the interactions are based upon the increase in R^2 over the additive model without adjusting for other interactions.

*$p < .05$

Table 9

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE

PREDICTING ATTRACTION

	R^2	R^2 Change	Beta	F
Saturated Model	.8382			12.491*
Additive Model	.7012			70.703*
Affective Reactions (AR)			.3226	7.687*
Uncertainty (U)			-.0495	.213
Trust (T)			.0941	.582
Forecasting (F)			.2592	3.766*
Time Adjusted for Covariates		.0016		.325
Interactions Adjusted for Covariates				
AR X Time		.0097		2.020
U X Time		.0079		1.646
T X Time		.0089		1.854
F X Time		.0041		.854
Within Subjects		.1023		2.269*

Note: The F values for the covariate main effects are based upon their Beta weights adjusted for the saturated model. The F values for the interactions are based upon the increase in R^2 over the additive model without adjusting for other interactions.

*$p < .05$

Table 10

PATH COEFFICIENTS FOR THE

FULLY CONNECTED MODEL:

WEEK 1 TO WEEK 5

	Time Variant Path Coefficients				
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
U to T	-.4160*	.1313	-.4241*	-.2942*	-.2131*
AR to T	.0951	.7986*	.1763	.3725*	.6027*

Time Invariant Path Coefficients			
AR to A	.3226*	AR to F	.3472*
U to A	-.0495	U to F	.0274
T to A	.0941	T to F	.3192*
F to A	.2592*		

Note: U=Uncertainty; AR=Affective Reactions; T=Trust; F=Forecasting; and A=Attraction.

*$p < .05$